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SECURITY COUNCIL
Fifty-second year

Letter dated 3 March 1997 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of Armenia to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to forward to you herewith the text of a statement issued on 3 March 1997 by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia.

I should be grateful if you would circulate the statement as a document of the General Assembly, under item 114 (b) of the preliminary list, and of the Security Council.

(Signed) Movses ABELIAN
Chargé d'affaires

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ANNEX

Statement issued on 3 March 1997 by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia

The Azerbaijani statement of 22 February 1997, with regard to what they call the Khojalu event, is the most cynical and vicious statement ever made by Azerbaijan.

Azerbaijan refers shamelessly to a 1992 military event, where, according to then-Azerbaijani President Mutalibov, the responsibility for the slaughter of the civilian population of the mostly Azeri city of Khojalu near the capital Stepanakert of Nagorny Karabakh fully falls on the Azeri opposition group, the Azerbaijani National Front.

In the days following the event, President Mutalibov, in an interview with Czech journalist Dana Mazalova published in the 2 April 1992 issue of the Russian newspaper Nizavisimaya Gazeta, said that the militia of the Azerbaijani National Front actively obstructed and actually prevented the exodus of the local population through the mountain passages specifically left open by Karabakh Armenians to facilitate the flight of the civilian population.

(On this matter, the September 1992 report of the Helsinki Watch international non-governmental organization quotes an Azerbaijani woman who says that Armenians had notified the Azerbaijani civilian population to leave the town with white flags raised.) In fact the Azerbaijani militia shot those who attempted to flee.

The hope and intention of the Azerbaijani opposition was to utilize civilian losses of such a magnitude to instigate a popular uprising against the Baku regime and seize the reins of power. Azerbaijan does not stop at simply distorting the truth. Not only does it falsely attribute its own opposition's merciless slaughter of Khojalu's civilian population to Armenians, it brazenly characterizes the killings as "distinctively inhumane and cruel" and "massacres". In so doing Azerbaijan fully comprehends that for the Armenian people these terms unfailingly evoke memories of massacre and genocide in Armenians' distant - and recent - past.

It is not coincidental that Azerbaijan has dared to make this statement on the anniversary of the most bloody event of Armenia's recent history. On 28 February 1988, when the people of Nagorny Karabakh were arguing by peaceful and constitutional means for their right to self-determination, Azerbaijani authorities organized and armed a mob, which began pogroms against Armenians in the Azerbaijani city of Sumgait. The Sumgait massacres were followed by killings and pillaging in Gianja in November 1988 and Baku in January 1990.

In the spring of 1991, the very leaders of the current Azerbaijani regime, assisted by the Soviet Army, organized the depopulation of the Armenian regions of Northern Artzakh, and the deportation of the Armenian population of Nagorny Karabakh and the surrounding 24 regions. Helsinki Watch, in the above-mentioned report, testifies that "these events were intended to exacerbate the fear and

horror of ethnic Armenians in other parts of Azerbaijan" and lead to the deportation and ethnic cleansing of more than 600,000 Armenians.

These atrocities were followed by a cycle of large-scale Azerbaijani military offensives and operations designed to produce a military solution to the conflict by annihilating the population of Nagorny Karabakh.

Although such acts have all taken place in the last decades of the twentieth century, the people of Nagorny Karabakh experienced a similar fate during the first two decades of this century as well. The massacres and pogroms of 1905 in Baku, and 1918 and 1920 in Shushi, where the entire city of Shushi was burned and its whole population was annihilated, are still vivid memories.

Therefore, this statement can only be seen as a crude, gross violation of the norms and principles of international law. While fostering an aggressive and exclusive nationalism, Azerbaijan blatantly promotes and incites ethnic hatred towards the population of Nagorny Karabakh, with whom it continuously claims it can peacefully and harmoniously live together. Further, Azerbaijan proclaims it can guarantee Karabakh's security and peaceful existence, even while it advances distrust and enmity by falsely accusing Armenians and callously misrepresenting its own role and responsibility in recent events.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia once again reiterates the warning sounded by the President of Armenia, Levon Ter-Petrossian, during the Lisbon summit of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, that, in the event of imposed Azerbaijani rule on Nagorny Karabakh, the people of Nagorny Karabakh will face the threat of genocide.